

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 SY-05 USSS-00 OC-06 CCO-00
TRSE-00 OPR-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 MCT-01 SSM-03 /068 W
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O R 270809Z DEC 76
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TO /SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2596
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SOPN, LE, ASEC
SUBJECT: EXPLOSION AT AN NAHAR BUILDING

REF: BEIRUT 8932

1. SUMMARY. FURTHER TO SAGA OF AN NAHAR, GRENADE EXPLODED AT ENTRANCE TO BUILDING DEC 23, KILLING ITS BEARER AS WELL AS PROBABLY ONE SYRIAN SOLDIER, AND WOUNDING SEVERAL OTHERS. OTHERWISE, PRESS CLOSURE SITUATION UNCHANGED. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO UPI CORRESPONDENT DAVID PIERCE, WHO WAS IN HIS OFFICE IN AN NAHAR BUILDING AT THE TIME, AN UNKNOWN YOUNG MAN WITH A LEBANESE ID CARD INDICATING HE FROM SIDON ATTEMPTED TO ENTER BUILDING APPROXIMATELY 1500, DEC 23. HE WAS STOPPED BY SYRIAN ASF GUARDS AND SMALL ARGUMENT ENSUED. HE THEN APPARENTLY REMOVED CHINESE MODEL GRENADE WITH WOODEN CASING FROM HIS POCKET, THEN EITHER BY DESIGN OR BY ACCIDENT DETONATED GRANADE. HE AND PROBABLY ONE SYRIAN GUARD WERE KILLED ALMOST INSTANTLY. LEBANESE BUILDING RECEPTIONIST AND TWO OTHER SYRIAN SOLDIERS WERE SEVERELY WOUNDED AND RUSHED TO HOSPITAL.
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3. SYRIAN TROOPS IMMEDIATELY SEARCHED AREA, ROUNDING UP THOSE FEW PERSONS IN THE BUILDING, INCLUDING UPI STAFF. THEY WERE DETAINED ON GROUND FLOOR SOME THREE HOURS, THEN RELEASED WITHOUT BEING QUESTIONED.

4. REPORT THAT ONE SYRIAN SOLDIER KILLED BY EXPLOSIVE BASED ON EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS, ALTHOUGH, ACCORDING TO WASHINGTON POST CORRESPONDENT STUART AUERBACH, SYRIAN AUTHORITIES DENY ONE OF THEIR OWN WAS KILLED. HE APPARENTLY IMMEDIATELY REMOVED, WHILE PERPETRATOR'S REMAINS WERE LEFT ON THE SPOT FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

5. INTERESTING SIDELIGHT OF EVENT REFLECTS STATE OF ON-THE-GROUND SYRIAN-LEBANESE WORKING RELATIONS: SPIFFILY-DRESSED LEBANESE POLICE CAPTAIN ARRIVED ON SCENE TO "INVESTIGATE" INCIDENT. (PIERCE SAID UNIFORM WAS UNFAMILIAR TO HIM BUT HE GUESSED IMMEDIATELY THE GENTLEMAN'S NATIONALITY BY THE KIND OF LOUD GOLD RING HE WAS WEARING -- NEVER WORN BY SYRIAN OFFICERS.) THE CAPTAIN SOUGHT TO INITIATE FORMAL LEBANESE POLICE INVESTIGATION, WITH LITTLE SUCCESS. WHEN HE SOUGHT TO ASSURE THAT PERPETRATOR'S BODY NOT BE MOVED OR HANDLED IN ANY WAY UNTIL A CORONER COULD MAKE AN ASSESSMENT, HE WAS RUDELY SHUNTED ASIDE BY SYRIANS, WHO POINTED OUT, WITH UNCONTESTABLE LOGIC, THAT THE MAN WAS ALREADY DEAD.

6. COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW AT THIS TIME WHO, IF ANYONE OTHER THAN THE PERPETRATOR HIMSELF, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR INCIDENT. ONE PLAUSIBLE THEORY IS THAT HE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH REJECTIONIST ELEMENTS, WHO WOULD WANT TO DRAMATIZE CLOSURE OF AN NAHAR.
HOUGHTON

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